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Non-domination, non-alienation and social equality: towards a republican understanding of equality

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The republican idea of non-domination stresses the importance of certain social relationships for a person's freedom, showing that freedom is a social-relational state. While the idea of freedom as non-domination receives a lot of attention in the literature, republican theorists say surprisingly little about equality. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to carve out the contours of a republican conception of equality.. In so doing, I will argue that republican accounts of equality share a significant normative overlap with the idea of social equality. However, closer analysis of Philip Pettit's account of 'expressive egalitarianism' (which Pettit sees as inherently connected to non-domination) and recent theories of social equality shows that republican non-domination – in contrast to what Pettit seems to claim – is not sufficient for securing (republican) social equality. In order to secure social equality for all, republicans would have to go beyond non-domination..

Key words: alienation; equality; non-domination; Pettit; republicanism; social equality

Introduction

Judging from the amount of publications on various aspects of neo-republican political theory, republicanism is currently an extremely popular topic for political philosophers.¹ In particular, the idea of freedom as non-domination, prominently defended by Philip Pettit

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(1996; 1997; 2008; 2011; 2012), seems to have become a cornerstone of contemporary normative political thought. However, while the prospects and limits of the republican ideal of freedom as non-domination are widely debated, one cannot help but notice that republican political theory seems somewhat quiet when it comes to discussing another key-value of political philosophy, to wit, equality.² Thus, whereas liberal egalitarians have spilled a lot of ink on conceptualizing the nature and value of equality, key republican thinkers such as Philip Pettit and Cécile Laborde have said comparatively little about the nature and value of equality for republican political theory.

This lack of engagement with equality certainly appears odd, since it seems fair to assume that if freedom as non-domination does indeed significantly differ from standard liberal accounts of freedom as non-interference, republicans should also end up defending a different conception of equality.³ Moreover, the question arises whether embracing non-domination does indeed tell us all we need to know about the value and protection of equality within a just republican society.⁴

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to carve out the contours of a republican conception of equality. Accordingly, I will begin by briefly analysing what leading republican thinkers such as Pettit and Laborde say about equality, and how their understanding of non-domination, as well as their normative vision of a just society, determines their framing of equality. Based on this analysis, I will argue that republican accounts of equality share a significant normative overlap with the idea of social equality, which has gained significant traction amongst political theorists. However, while republican thought on equality does indeed go well together with recent accounts of social equality, a closer look at the ideal of social equality and Pettit's (2012, pp. 78–91) account of 'expressive egalitarianism' shows that republican non-domination – in contrast to what Pettit seems to claim – is not sufficient for securing (republican) social equality. Therefore, based on the normative commitments

most republican theorists have, we should expand the range of cases to which non-domination applies, as well as include in our basic values a principle of non-alienation, which covers forms of social vulnerability that non-domination seems ill-equipped to address. The overall aim of my paper is to clarify current republican thinking on equality, and to bring republicans and social egalitarians closer together by demonstrating their significant normative overlap.

Republicanism and equality

The primary focus of republican theorists is non-domination, since the normative ideal of a just society which republicans defend is based on the idea of the state as promoting the freedom of its citizens. As Pettit (1997, p. 80) argues, the ideal of non-domination is ‘the one and only yardstick by which to judge the social and political constitution of a community’.⁵ Thus, while liberal egalitarians struggle to reconcile different values (such as freedom as non-interference and equality) within a coherent normative vision of society, republicans who fully embrace the ‘demands of promoting non-domination’ do not need to value equality independently of freedom, since non-domination ‘already requires institutions that perform well in regard to values like equality and welfare’ (Pettit 1997, p. 81). For Pettit, the ideal of non-domination and its associated conception of social justice in themselves imply a certain commitment to and conception of equality, to wit, ‘expressive egalitarianism’.

Since republicans value non-domination as a good that should be enjoyed by all persons, Pettit (2012, p. 78) argues that republicans subscribe to expressive egalitarianism, which is based on the ‘assumption that the state ought to treat people as equals’. As Pettit understands it, freedom as non-domination is a basic personal good and thus ‘the sort of thing that anyone will desire for themselves’, that is, an all-purpose instrumental good which allows people to make choices freely by reducing their vulnerability.⁶ For Pettit (1997, p. 91),

non-domination not only protects people's freedom from arbitrary interference, but also conveys to them their status of being persons and citizens whose 'voice cannot properly be ignored'. Consequently, according to a republican account of justice the state is required to treat – through implementing freedom as non-domination – all citizens as equals (Pettit 2012, p. 81).

Precisely because non-domination is a personal good which everyone desires and which seems necessary for being a free person, Pettit concludes that every person should enjoy freedom as non-domination. Moreover, because freedom as non-domination is a status one enjoys in relation to other people, since domination is a social ill which stems from one person or group (or the state) being able to arbitrarily interfere with another person (or group), Pettit (1997, p. 110) claims that non-domination is an egalitarian and communitarian good. This means two things.

First, since 'the intensity of freedom as non-domination which a person enjoys in a society is a function of other people's powers as well as their own', it seems very likely that overall non-domination is best promoted by everybody enjoying non-domination equally (Pettit 1997, p. 113). In other words, the ideal of non-domination is structurally egalitarian in that non-domination can only be achieved if all are equal in some fundamental sense, such as equality before the law. Second, freedom as non-domination is not only a social good, which means that it only exists where there are other people around and legal and social arrangements in place which ensure non-domination, but also a common good insofar as it aims at reducing everybody's (and every social group's) vulnerability (Pettit 1997, pp. 122–123).

For Pettit, it is these two features of non-domination which provide the egalitarian credentials of his theory. Due to their commitment to the ideal of non-domination, then, republicans should advance an expressively egalitarian politics, which implies a substantive

egalitarian component and a sufficientarian inequality-limiting component. On the one hand, a 'republican theory of justice supports a substantive egalitarianism in the currency of free and undominated status' (Pettit 2012, p. 88). In other words, republicans can only consider a society just in which every person enjoys the free and equal status of being an undominated member of society. On the other hand, since republicans do not value equality independently of non-domination, republican justice is sufficientarian with regard to the distribution of goods and capabilities. That is to say, instead of arguing for material equality for equality's sake, republicans should aim for a distribution of rights, goods and resources that secures every person's status as free from domination and provides a sufficient level of undominated choice. As Pettit observes, 'what it means for the state to treat citizens as equals ... is to provide them each with a certain threshold benefit in the currency of free or undominated choice'. This 'is why the [republican] approach can be cast as sufficientarian' (Pettit 2012, p. 88).

Pettit's conception of equality thus combines a substantively egalitarian status requirement with a sufficientarian undominated choice requirement. While the status requirement is immutable, the exact conditions of the undominated choice requirement are society relative, since one's ability to undominatedly make a range of choices depends on everybody else's endowments, status and resources (Pettit 2012, p. 85). This account thus features a distinctly social-relational component, which Pettit (2012, p. 91) acknowledges by briefly referring to the literature on social equality, which will be discussed below.⁷

Cécile Laborde offers a similar account of the value of non-domination and its implicit consequences for understanding the nature and value of equality. According to Laborde (2008, p. 11), republicans focus on a normative ideal of free and equal citizenship, which holds that 'I am free when I am recognized by others as enjoying a status that resiliently protects me against arbitrary interference and guarantees my equal status as a citizen living in

community with others'. Laborde thus also emphasizes that republicans are concerned with an ideal of freedom which perceives freedom to be a social (and recognitive) status one can only enjoy in relation to others. Therefore, Laborde (2008, p. 11) claims, 'republicans are social egalitarians: they are concerned about the quality of relationships that citizens enjoy with one another, and about the way in which large inequalities of condition and differences in life experiences affect the common status of citizenship'.

In characterizing republicanism in this way, Laborde stresses the social-relational nature of her theory, which seems to draw not only on the idea of non-domination but also on Pettit's (2001) complex normative account of freedom as discursive control (Laborde 2008, p. 155). In other words, while Laborde, just like Pettit, defines the value of equality primarily through non-domination, she adds the idea of socio-political voice and social recognition as key elements of a person's status as a free and equal member of society.⁸

Despite this admittedly rather brief overview of Laborde's and Pettit's theories, it seems fair to conclude that republicanism is less concerned with distributive material equality than with a form of social equality, which aims to secure every citizens' free and equal status through non-domination. This is a highly interesting point considering the fact that in the past 15 years a range of authors within the liberal-egalitarian debate on equality and justice have issued calls for a stronger focus on social equality (Anderson 1999; Fourie 2012; Miller 1997; O'Neill 2008; Scanlon 2002; Scheffler 2003; 2010; Schemmel 2012). Since Laborde (2008, p.11, notes 46 and 47) and Pettit (2012, p. 91) both explicitly refer to the social equality literature, it makes sense to investigate whether republicans are indeed social egalitarians and, if they are, what this entails for the republican project more generally.

Conceptualizing social equality

While the idea of social equality enjoys growing popularity among political philosophers, it is important to point out that there exists no standard definition of the term, since different authors have used the concept in different ways.⁹ However, despite the fact that there exists no canonical statement of what social equality is, I will try to flesh out the basic features of social equality by looking at the main commonalities in existing statements. Doing so will give us a picture of social equality which is sharp enough to enable a comparison of the ideal of social equality with the conception(s) of equality presented by Pettit and Laborde.

The basic normative assumption from which champions of social equality set out is the idea of a just society as a community of free and equal persons. David Miller (1997, p. 23), for instance, argues that social equality is the basic feature of ‘a society that is not marked by status divisions such that one can place different people in hierarchically ranked categories’, while Thomas Scanlon (2002, p. 43) claims that a society of equals must be a society without ‘stigmatizing differences in status’. Similarly, Samuel Scheffler (2010, p. 225) holds that social equality expresses our fundamental commitment to the idea ‘that there is something valuable about human relationships that are, in certain crucial respects at least, unstructured by differences of rank, power, or status’. For Scheffler, social equality is in fact the normative ideal which should govern the social and political workings of society.

According to its proponents, social equality is valuable because it protects every person’s status as a free and equal member of society. Social equality is concerned with the relationships people stand in and what people can do and be within these relationships. Phrased differently, social equality concerns more the harmful effects of certain social relationships and their associated inequalities, than the equal distribution of a particular set of goods or the provision of equal initial opportunity. This reading of equality distinguishes social egalitarians from classic distributive egalitarians, whose focus is determining the

adequate currency for egalitarian distributions and the exact principles of such distribution (e.g., strict distributive equality vs. priority for the worst-off) (Fourie 2012, p. 108).

Social egalitarians thus primarily worry about the negative effects of certain inequalities. Martin O'Neill, for instance, observes that inequality can lead to a whole range of issues which threaten a person's standing as a free and equal member of society, including 'stigmatizing differences in status', 'domination', the undermining of people's self-respect, erosion of social trust and solidarity, the inability to satisfy basic needs, as well as the cultivation of servile behavior.¹⁰ In a similar vein, Scheffler (2010, p. 227) defines certain inequalities as problematic because they undermine people's self-respect and free social exchange, while Anderson (1999, p. 313) and Schemmel (2012, p. 142) are concerned with instances of domination and arbitrary interference. Scanlon (2002, p. 44) argues for the value of the ideal of social equality by highlighting that social inequalities 'give some people an unacceptable degree of control over the lives of others'.

On the whole, social equality is about the effect social inequalities have on people's relations a.) to each other (in terms of status hierarchies and power imbalances) and b.) to themselves (in terms of feelings of inferiority and lack of self-respect).¹¹ This dual concern seems to go well together with Pettit's (2012, p. 83) call that a just society must guarantee every person her 'undominated status both in the objective and the subjective or inter-subjective sense of status'.

However, while there certainly exists significant normative overlap between social egalitarians and republicans, since many social egalitarians explicitly use republican ideas such as non-domination and republicans explicitly embrace social equality theories, the question arises as to whether republican non-domination is indeed – as Pettit suggests – sufficient for fulfilling and safeguarding social equality. Or, phrased differently, it yet remains to be seen whether social equality and non-domination really address the same

issues, and whether social equality can be achieved by subscribing to the ideal of non-domination alone.

Social (in)equality, non-domination and the vulnerable self

Social equality concerns about the negative effects of social inequalities with regard to people's relations to each other and people's relation to themselves. Pettit also explicitly addresses two kinds of evil, namely arbitrary interference of one agent with the choices of another and the formation of servile behaviour in response to being subject to domination. Pettit wants, on the one hand, to secure people's equal status so that nobody has to bow, kowtow and scrape (2012, p. 82) and, on the other hand, to ensure people enjoy a set of undominated choices as part of their basic liberties (2012, pp. 92–104). However, as several commentators (Garrau and Laborde forthcoming; Krause 2013; Markell 2008; Thompson 2013) have pointed out, Pettit restricts his analysis to the negative effects of domination, which means he fails to deal adequately with other instances of social and structural inequality and people's associated vulnerabilities.

The problem with the neo-republican ideal of non-domination is that it is only concerned with one person's or group's ability to arbitrarily interfere with another person's or group's actions. While Pettit rightly highlights that domination can extend to a whole range of cases that are quite removed from the neo-republican standard example of master and slave, the basic focus of domination remains on one agent's power to arbitrarily interfere with another agent.

This means that even though Pettit (2012) explicitly fleshes out the social egalitarian credentials of his theory through arguing that republican justice is committed to the ideal of substantive status equality, the only inequalities in status Pettit's theory appears to object to are those which stem from dominating power imbalances between two agents, with one agent

having (at least in theory) control over the other (Krause 2013; Thompson 2013). This is precisely the reason why Pettit employs the image of one person bowing and scraping as his standard example of dominating relationships, since in these cases one agent exhibits a certain form of subservient behaviour because she fears the other person's power to interfere and control.

Within contemporary societies, though, this kind of dominating relationship is not the only issue which can impact on both people's equal status as free citizens and their range and quality of available undominated choices. Critics have pointed out at least three further issues with which Pettit's principle of non-domination seems to struggle: 1.) people's significant social vulnerability (Garrau and Laborde forthcoming; Honneth 1995); 2.) the unintentional (and thus not controlled) but yet pervasive effects of forms of socio-cultural practices, orderings and hierarchies (Krause 2013; Thompson 2013); and 3.) the complex nature of harmful social inequalities (Krause 2013; Schuppert 2013b). As will become clear, these three phenomena actually overlap, since, for instance, people's social vulnerability is often exacerbated by the way that socio-cultural practices and orderings generate and perpetuate the inheritance of harmful social inequality across generations.

So how do these issues relate to Pettit's account of non-domination and in what way could a social egalitarian reading of republicanism help address the above-mentioned issues? To answer this question, it is first necessary to explicate in further detail what is meant by 1.) social vulnerability, 2.) socio-cultural practices and orderings and 3.) complex harmful social inequalities, and how these three phenomena can violate a person's equal status as a free person and her quality and range of undominated choices.

The idea of people's significant social vulnerability (1.)) draws on the insight that being a free and equal person requires a certain form of social agency understood as the capacity to see oneself as a legitimate source of claims and reasons. However, becoming a free social

agent is no solitary task: free and autonomous agency is a capacity that is developed in the realm of the social, through standing in mutually recognitive relationships which allow an agent to see herself and others as legitimate rational reason-givers in a shared social space (Pippin 2000). As Axel Honneth (1992; 1995; 2011) has pointed out, this need for social recognition for developing one's agency is a key aspect of a social-relational account of freedom like Pettit's. In fact, in his account of freedom as discursive control Pettit also acknowledges the importance of recognition for a social account of freedom.¹²

However, such a discursive account of freedom seems to require a more in-depth analysis of the conditions for free and autonomous agency (Schuppert 2013a). Put differently, a recognition-sensitive account of social agency and freedom cares not only about the social intersubjective relationships an agent stands in with regard to the actual exercise of a free action (which would be the realm of non-domination proper), but also about the effects of intersubjective relationships on a person's relation to herself. While Pettit's account of non-domination does so, too, the point which Honneth and others (e.g., Garrau and Laborde forthcoming; Mackenzie 2008) are keen to make is that many forms of misrecognition and their associated ill-effects on a person's conception of herself cannot be traced back to an instance of domination. A society's culture, a mode of production, a linguistic community's conventions can all operate – in certain societal circumstances – as structural and perpetual tools of misrecognition, thereby in the long run undermining a person's ability to see herself as a free and autonomous agent. The problem with these structural modes of misrecognition is that they are often unintended and not controlled by a single actor or group of actors, with the result that it appears odd to classify them as forms of domination. While Pettit (2012, p. 87) is aware of how an agent can fail to see herself as a free and equal member of society – for instance, because of feeling shame on account of her poverty – the problem is that his exclusive focus on domination as the root of all harmful status inequalities fails to address

issues such as a person's alienation from herself through structural societal regimes of misrecognition and the like.

Alienation from oneself means that an agent fails to see herself as a legitimate source of claims and reasons, that is, the agent does not realize her capacity for freedom because of a range of autonomy-undermining experiences of misrecognition, powerlessness, voicelessness and exclusion. As Rahel Jaeggi (2005) points out, alienation has varied, differing faces, since within our advanced capitalist production processes many ways of life, certain social groups and a range of belief systems are systematically subject to alienating economic, political, and cultural practices and structures. The key problem with alienation is that its instances do not lead to a situation in which a person's freedom is dependent upon the good will of a benevolent dictator or subject to potential arbitrary interference, which are the cases non-domination is most concerned with. Instead, instances of alienation create conditions in which an agent is unable to relate properly to herself, to see herself as an equal member of society and to reason autonomously, that is, to responsibly endorse her own reasons and judgments. Alienation threatens the 'inner' conditions of free agency and freedom through the negative effects social and intersubjective relationships have on a person's self-understanding and self-respect.

The idea of a person's social vulnerability and dependency on recognition necessarily leads to a consideration of the potential threat of the unintentional and not controlled but yet pervasive effects of forms of socio-cultural practices, orderings and hierarchies on people's freedom (Krause 2013; Thompson 2013), that is, the second further issue mentioned above (2.)). While recognition theory allowed us to see that Pettit's account struggles with the alienating effects of unintentional and not controlled instances of misrecognition, additional problems are posed for his account by the nature of unintentional and not controlled forms of socio-cultural practices, orderings and hierarchies.

The first problem, as Sharon Krause (2013, pp. 190–192) points out, stems from Pettit's claim that domination only occurs in circumstances in which an agent A *intentionally* arbitrarily interferes with another agent B's choices, or in cases in which it is common knowledge that A has the power to arbitrarily interfere with B (Pettit 1997, pp. 52–53, 60). According to Pettit (1997, p. 53), dominating interference by A is always intended to worsen B's situation or reduce B's range of choices.¹³ However, Krause rightly suggests that many forms of social discrimination and marginalization escape this account of domination, since they occur unintentionally through the unconscious reproduction of social stereotyping and stigmatization. As Krause puts it,

norms of femininity continue to emphasize deference, compliancy and other qualities that are antithetical to our understanding of authority. As a result, what counts as a confidence-inspiring authoritative demeanor in a man makes a woman seem strident, overly demanding, nasty – even to other women. Public aversion to this demeanor impedes women's efforts to exercise authority effectively and thereby undercuts the exercise of their agency. Of course, most people do not intend to obstruct women's freedom; their aversion to what appears to them as unfeminine behavior is not exactly a choice (Krause 2013, p.193).

If Krause's analysis is correct, Pettit's theory faces a major issue since many forms of harmful and freedom-undermining social disadvantage follow a similar pattern to the one described in her example. The power an agent is subject to is often the result of a diffuse set of social norms, attitudes and practices, which means there is no clear intentional and controlled application of power over a specific agent.

Therefore, Pettit's focus on domination as deliberate intentional interference with the goal of worsening another person's situation seems overly narrow, even if he is aware of the fact that 'impersonal restrictions that arise non-intentionally from the natural order or from the way things are socially organized' may harm people's freedom (Pettit 2001, p. 132). In fact, in his discussion of different restrictions to an agent's freedom, Pettit (1997, p. 53; 2001,

pp. 129–132) seems to introduce a binary opposition which ‘wrongly assumes that obstacles to individual action are either the products of natural (i.e. non-human) forces or result from intentional decisions by discrete human beings’ (Krause 2013, p. 191). It should be fairly clear, though, that a person’s freedom and self-respect can be threatened and violated by the unintended consequences of intentional acts or by the impersonal workings of social structures.¹⁴

The problem for republicans like Pettit is that the unintended freedom-hampering and self-respect undermining effects of intentional actions come in many shapes and guises, including unreflective stereotyping, gendered socialization and education, and the implementation of political policies with unforeseen side-effects, as well as cultural practices embedded within current modes of production and consumerism (Thompson 2013). Moreover, there are social structures in place from which nobody is excluded, meaning that all agents are – to widely varying degrees – subject to the same pressures and categorizations. A good example of an all-encompassing social structure is our institutionalized conception of work, labour and time, which ultimately affects every person’s life-choices and shapes all social interactions (Postone 1996). However, different people are differently affected by these structures and thus differently treated, perceived and recognized.

There are two distinct issues at stake here. The first is the fact that unintended consequences and uncontrolled power structures can significantly limit a person’s freedom. The second is the fact that the same consequences and structures can also undermine a person’s self-respect, that is, have an alienating effect on her relation to herself. Both of these issues matter from the viewpoint of social equality, since unintended consequences and uncontrolled power structures can undermine a person’s status as a free and equal member of society. Pettit’s account of social equality through non-domination seems unable to adequately deal with either.

The third issue introduced above, namely, the complex nature of harmful social inequalities (3.)), lends further weight to the concerns just raised. Complex social inequalities come in many different forms and their harmful effects on people's freedom, self-respect and social status cannot always be traced back to instances of domination. While the problems posed by, for example, a rigid social class structure are – on a very friendly reading of Pettit – at least partially covered by Pettit's definition of domination as 'common knowledge' that A has power over B (though whether in a rigid class society that is always true is certainly debatable), there are other forms of similar group-based social disadvantage which are not. In fact, the common knowledge criterion of Pettit's theory seems rather problematic in cases in which social stratification, sexist public culture, or everyday racism have become a kind of false 'second nature', that is, a part of people's subconscious framing of the world. Growing up in a sexist society might obscure people's views of actually existing power structures so that socially constructed illegitimate inequalities are perceived as unobjectionable natural inequalities and differences (Thompson 2013, p. 278). Pettit's definition of domination therefore seems problematic with regard to both the intentionality of arbitrary interference and the common knowledge of existing power imbalances.

A related issue is the fact that many social inequalities materialize in early childhood due to children's different social backgrounds. These early differences grow over time, since most educational systems are poorly equipped to mitigate already existing differences in key skills, including linguistic development, social cognition and basic rational thinking. In many cases, then, early childhood disadvantages get sooner or later translated into weaker performance in school, which turns an initial social inequality into a 'natural' one, with well performing children being labelled as 'smart' and poorly performing children as 'dumb'. This division in school also frequently leads to further differences down the road, such as inequality in income, prestige and often even health (Schuppert 2013b). It seems quite

difficult, though, to establish that society as such, or the educational system or the parents of the disadvantaged children dominate the children in question. However, from the viewpoint of social equality these issues matter, at least if early childhood disadvantage is recognized as a significant cause of social inequalities among adults.

The question thus arises if, and how, republicans can respond to all these issues, considering that these problems affect people's freedom and self-respect in ways that should concern a social egalitarian republican.

Reconciling republican freedom and social egalitarianism

In light of the criticisms and issues raised above, I suggest two changes to the current republican framework, namely, a re-definition and extension of the idea of domination, as well as the addition of a principle of non-alienation. Both these changes will help republicans in embracing a demanding version of social equality as their conception of equality.

The first change must deal with the issues we identified with regard to Pettit's definition of non-domination, since both the intentionality criterion and the common knowledge condition proved to be problematic. A definition which (at least partially) avoids these issues without collapsing into a non-limitation view (Pettit 2001, pp. 129–132) is the following:¹⁵

Domination occurs if either an agent A (which can be an individual, a group or an institution) has the power to intentionally arbitrarily interfere with an agent B (which can be an individual or a group) or if an individual's, a group's or an institution's actions and practices structurally disadvantage (i.e., over a longer period of time through an identifiable mechanism), without due concern for her relevant fundamental interests, an agent B with regard to her status as a free and equal person.

This definition of domination drops the reference to common knowledge and introduces a dimension of structural disadvantage.¹⁶ While the revised definition of domination keeps the intentional interference component intact (since extending domination to all forms of

arbitrary unintended interference would indeed be a step too far), it adds the aspect of structural disadvantage, which addresses some of the major criticisms outlined above. By adding social disadvantage to its definition, domination can now be understood as extending to matters such as the restrictions on women's career options in sexist societies or the damaging transformations of people's private lives triggered by the economization of culture and politics.

However, at the same time the structural disadvantage component comes with certain limitations, since it only applies to cases in which people's fundamental interests are concerned and in which their status as free and equal is threatened or violated.¹⁷ Limiting the scope of domination in this way is crucial because, if all forms of social disadvantage were subsumed under the heading of (non-)domination, republicans would lack the means to distinguish between severe injustices and less objectionable social inequalities. Not all social inequalities and structural imbalances undermine a person's status as free and equal.

The second change, namely, the principle of non-alienation, chiefly concerns the negative effects of inequalities, structural disadvantages and misrecognition on people's self-respect. The principle of non-alienation can be defined as follows:

The principle of non-alienation holds that a society should protect all its members against social relationships and structures in which inequalities in power, status differences, institutional mechanisms, social practices or cultural artefacts lead to a person's loss of self-respect or alienation from herself through the explicit or systematic disrespect of the affected person's (or group's) status as socially free and equal.

Defined in this way, the principle of non-alienation is able to address three important issues: first, it acts as a substitute for Pettit's second definition of domination, which held that publicly known differences in power can lead a person to adapt her behaviour so as to bow, scrape and kowtow; second, the principle of non-alienation accommodates Garrau and Laborde's criticism of non-domination, namely, that misrecognition and structural forms of

disrespect can impact on the vulnerable self; third, the principle of non-alienation offers a functioning safeguard for the protection of people's proper relation to self, which is a key aspect of most social-egalitarian theories.

The principle of non-alienation is concerned with the 'inner' conditions of free and autonomous agency. Because of this focus on the 'inner' conditions of free and autonomous agency, non-alienation is – in contrast with Pettit's account of non-domination – better able to deal with cases in which social hierarchies, based on a discriminating background culture, are considered as 'natural' constraints on the freedom of certain social groups. Moreover, non-alienation is also better able to criticize and offer protection against individuals submitting to functional imperatives stemming from illegitimate social differences or structurally disadvantaging social practices (Thompson 2013).

Taken together, the re-defined idea of non-domination and the principle of non-domination both ensure the protection of republican justice, as defined by Pettit, and the implementation of social equality, as defined above. Accordingly, if republicans were willing to embrace non-domination plus non-alienation, it would indeed be possible to claim that the republican conception of equality is a conception of social equality. Since social egalitarians and republicans subscribe to very similar ideals of social justice and freedom, such a marriage would help the cause of both, namely, the attainment of a state in which people relate to each other as free and equal.

Conclusion

Leading republican theorists such as Pettit and Laborde have gestured towards a republican conceptualization of equality, revealing common ground with so-called social egalitarians. In this paper, I critically investigated the republican understanding of equality, arguing that Pettit's account of non-domination actually struggles to fully defend and safeguard a social

egalitarian account of social justice. I therefore proposed two changes to Pettit's existing account, namely, an extension of the definition of domination so as to include instances of structural non-intentional interference, as well as the addition of a principle of non-alienation in order to protect people against socially caused losses of self-respect. In adopting these two changes, republican philosophers could indeed defend an attractive ideal of social equality based on their commitment to non-domination and non-alienation. This move should not be viewed as eroding republicanism's distinctiveness as a body of theory, but rather as a conscious effort to strengthen the case for a distinctly republican, social-egalitarian account of a society of free and equal persons.

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Notes

¹ There exist different forms and traditions of republicanism and the focus of this paper will be exclusively so-called 'neo-republican' thought as represented by philosophers like Philip Pettit. For reasons of simplicity, I will use for the remainder of the paper the terms republicanism/republican without further qualification. For in-depth discussions of republicanism, see Castiglione (2005) and Van Gelderen and Skinner (2002). For a rough idea of how widespread and constructive the debate on various aspects of republican political theory is, see Laborde and Maynor (2008), Dagger (1997; 2006), and Bellamy (2007), as well as special issues in *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* (2003) and the *European Journal of Political Theory* (2010).

² In chapter four of *Republicanism*, Pettit (1997, pp. 110–126) discusses the egalitarian credentials of his theory, claiming that non-domination as such is an egalitarian good, since maximizing non-domination requires that everybody enjoys non-domination equally. As he sees it (1997, pp. 113–119), non-domination calls for structural equality, not material equality. In his 2012 book, *On the people's terms*, Pettit (2012, pp. 77–92) further expands on his view concerning equality, claiming that a republican account of social justice must be fundamentally committed to what he calls ‘expressive egalitarianism’. This is a point I return to below.

Laborde (2008, p. 11) also discusses the relationship between republicanism and equality, arguing that critical republicans like herself should embrace a social egalitarianism. Again, this is a point I explore further below.

³ Whether non-domination is really that different from negative liberty is a contested issue. See Carter (1999; 2000; 2008), Harbour (2012), Kramer (2003; 2008) and Pettit (2008).

⁴ Pettit seems to assume that embracing the value of freedom as non-domination leads us to a particular understanding of equality, i.e. expressive egalitarianism, and that for safeguarding this form of equality all we need is non-domination proper. Here I challenge this assumption.

⁵ The most basic definition of non-domination is that no person should be able to arbitrarily interfere with the choices of another person. Pettit distinguishes between individuals and groups arbitrarily interfering with each other (*dominium*) and the arbitrary use of the coercive powers of the state (*imperium*). For an in-depth analysis of domination and a defence of the view that domination is best understood as referring to problematic issues in a social relationship's structure, see Lovett (2010).

⁶ Pettit (1997, pp. 82–92). Pettit's focus on vulnerability is an important aspect of his theory, which I return to below.

⁷ Unfortunately, Pettit does not engage further with the literature on social equality.

⁸ In his account of freedom as discursive control, Pettit (2001) also refers to the importance of recognition, but unfortunately – as with his cursory engagement with the social equality literature (see above) – this is only a fleeting note, which leaves the reader unsatisfied.

⁹ Within the literature one finds different terms used to describe social equality, including ‘relational equality’, ‘complex equality’ and ‘status equality’. What is important for the discussion here is that despite these linguistic differences, there seems to exist a broad ideal of social equality that most of the authors mentioned above agree on. For a collection of views on the nature and value of social equality, see Fourie, Schuppert and Wallimann-Helmer (forthcoming).

¹⁰ O'Neill (2008, pp. 121–123). O'Neill actually sees himself as a distributive egalitarian and he uses a more Rawlsian framework than many of the other social egalitarians. However, in his analysis of the negative effects of inequality on people's social standing, O'Neill seems firmly in the social egalitarian camp.

¹¹ It is interesting to observe that John Rawls (2001, p. 131) very much shares this concern for the negative effects of social inequality, arguing that social inequalities 'may arouse widespread attitudes of deference and servility on one side and a will to dominate and arrogance on the other'.

¹² Pettit (2001, p. 72). It is important to note, though, that Honneth's account of recognition does not map very well onto Pettit's accounts of freedom (see Schuppert 2013a for an extended argument to this effect). After all, recognition is a complex concept with distinct pitfalls and problems. See McBride (2013) for an excellent discussion.

¹³ Throughout the next few paragraphs I focus on Pettit's definition of domination as intentional arbitrary interference, though it should be noted that Pettit's definition also includes domination as the potential for arbitrary interference in a situation in which it is 'common knowledge' that agent A has dominating power over agent B. As will become clear below, this second definition of domination is similarly problematic.

¹⁴ A further issue with Pettit's account of domination, which I won't explore here, is presented by cases in which people are dominated but made better off, since Pettit assumes arbitrary interference always aims at worsening the dominated subject's situation.

¹⁵ The non-limitation view holds that all limitations on an agent's freedom, no matter whether intentional or unintentional, are objectionable. The non-limitation view only cares about the number of choices an agent has, not what constraints these choices in the first place. Thus, on the non-limitation view there is no difference between an avalanche and a dictator reducing an agent's choice to one option.

¹⁶ It is important to note that revising the idea of non-domination in this way possibly goes hand in hand with a different conception of social power and its ill effects. Whether re-conceiving social power and domination in such a way is true to the historical ideal of republican non-domination is an issue I cannot address here.

However, rethinking non-domination seems necessary for bringing contemporary republicanism and social egalitarianism closer together. I am indebted to Sofia Näsström and Eva Erman for pressing me on this point.

¹⁷ For further explication of the idea of fundamental interests, see Schuppert (2013a).

Note on contributor

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